

Colloquium February 14, 2025
Nathan Lam (Eastman School of Music)

Title: “Canon and Symmetry”

Abstract:

Join me in celebrating my new album *Symmetricon*. The album features my piano piece *77 Canons on Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* (2020), which was premiered and recorded by Jihye Chang (Boston University) in 2022. David Lewin’s seminal work *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* (1987) generalized atonal set theory and connected mathematical groups—the language of symmetry—to music. My set of canons is a musical celebration of this theoretical tradition.

In this talk, I will explore the compositional aspects of my work and share contrapuntal tips and tricks I’ve learned along the way. Enjoy an excessively detailed analysis of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” as well as discussions on puzzle canons, canons that are not canons, interscalar transformations, hypermetric alignment in retrograde canons, and the retrograde-inversion canon J.S. Bach never wrote. Through transformational theory, I will also explore a music theory of the visual arts, deepening our understanding of these interconnected disciplines.

Album description:

Nathan Lam: *Symmetricon*

Jihye Chang, piano

This album features 77 canons that started as classroom examples and ended in contrapuntal madness. You’ll find rounds, mirror canons, crab canons, sloth canons, mirror-crab-sloth canons, and canons that, as Douglas Hofstadter would describe, stretch J.S. BACH to John CAGE. (A horrifying thought.) Completed during the COVID pandemic, they reflect a journey through darkness and hope. Stream the album here: <https://nathanlam.com/music/>